All Roads Lead to Falconreach

A DragonFable Fanzine

Quenelda

The moment we met Lady Celestia and Twilly with the Black Dragon Box on that cliff, the world of DragonFable opened up and we have never looked back.

All Roads Lead to Falconreach is a collection of fan-made artworks and written works, exploring the many locations of Lore that the story and characters have taken us to.

Happy 20th birthday DragonFable, thank you for the adventures past, present and future, and we hope you all enjoy the zine! Also you should give me gold. Dragons like gold.

A big thank you to Dove, Verlyrus and Dracelix, and all of the other devs who have worked on DragonFable over the years!

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Nieboheim

Edelia

Nieboheim

Night fell, and the holy city was dark.

It had never been like this before. There were always streetlamps. Always people staying up late, their lights still on despite the hour. Always, if nothing else, the glow of the mana itself, running beneath the streets. But now, the Seym was cracked, the Magesterium was gone, and the mana channels were dim and empty.

Marciusz lit the stove. It would give him some light and warmth. He opened a package of instant pierogi, thanking the Shapeless for it, and ate them dry- he could not afford to waste water on them. At home, there would be wells, but in Nieboheim, water flowed only by the powers of the Magesterium. Fortunately, the rains had been plentiful, pouring from the sky as though the Shapeless itself was grieving for its Blessed.

Soon, he would have to go out again. To risk the judgement of the Shapeless, again. He should not fear it, but he did.

He was ashamed to be so scared. It had spared him before. But there were others who it had left at first, only to devour another day. He did not know why. Perhaps they had sinned, held impure thoughts in their heart. Two days ago, a woman told him that she hated the Shapeless for what it had done. That the idols that had once reassured her now made her sick. She was weeping into an armful of scavenged supplies. He had not seen her since.

It didn't matter. The Shapeless might judge him, or it might not. Starvation would certainly kill him.

Marciusz prayed, for he had nothing else to do until morning. *Shapeless, grant us salvation. Shapeless, show us mercy. Shapeless...*

He did not know what to pray for. Nor whether the Shapeless would listen. A man in the street had screamed that it had gone mad. *Blasphemy*, Marciusz thought, pushing the words out of his mind, and pressed his hands together until they ached. He did not believe that madman. He trusted the Shapeless. He and his sister had been among the crowd at the Forum that day, watching people who ran towards it in hopes of a blessing. Perhaps it had blessed them, in a way. He'd been frozen, terrified, but he did not run. He trusted it, after all.

He was loyal. He had not flinched. Surely, this meant something. *Shapeless, please tell me why. Why devour my sister, and not me? Why spare us one day, and take us the next?*

Slowly, the answer came to him. The city was closed, and the Magesterium broken. If it were not for the Shapeless, they would soon run out of food. There would be starvation and bloodshed in the streets. The Shapeless's judgement was terrifying, but it would be far worse without it bearing the burden of sacrifice. It was not a pleasant truth. Still, Marciusz felt better in realizing it. Things could always be worse, but the Shapeless would protect them. He had faith.

Edelia

When the construction of Edelia was nearing completion all those centuries ago, Baltael insisted that the doorways and windows be left open, even those in the school's main surrounding wall. Oyva had never been fond of the idea - Tkaanie was not exactly the safest place in the world, sandwiched between Volkenraand and The Shapeless Empire, and should those nations ever come to blows again, Edelia would likely be one of the first battlegrounds. Its status as the premier Soulweaving academy did it no favors on that front, as each empire would surely seek to gain control of it. Open doors and windows would not help in its defense, especially as Baltael was firm on the students being banned from using Soulweaving in combat. But he still insisted on the school's physical openness, his reasoning being that "the students ought to feel the wind as it flows through the hallways." Oyva had begrudgingly relented. She would rather not get her way than cause a conflict, especially with her own brother. Her family was already broken enough as is. And so Edelia was constructed, with the walls and windows all shaped and angled to direct the currents of the wind through them.

There was no wind flowing through them, anymore.

Baltael had sent a brief message before the end. "Sister of mine - something happened in Ull. It's Father." Oyva had felt it too, of course. A scream echoing through the planes, a cacophony of confusion and pain, and suddenly there were dozens of newborn elemental spirits. It had their father's stench all over it. For the longest time, she had hoped against hope that he... no, *it* - not like there was any actual humanity left in that tainted soul any longer - had perished, preferably painfully, alone in some remote corner of the world. But she knew better, in her heart of hearts. Her father had always been obsessed with immortality, and if there was one thing about *it*, *it* always got *its* way in the end.

But not this time, it seemed. Oyva had been rushing to golden, sprawling Nieboheim, following *its* spiritual residue. She had only just crossed the grand bridge into the city when she saw thousands of anguished souls spewed from its highest, gleaming tower accompanied with such a frightful, shattering scream she thought the very gods themselves had been set aflame. She allowed herself to feel relieved, in that instant. Baltael had to have succeeded. Their father was no more. All those anguished souls that *it* had consumed over years, finally released. All the suffering that *it* had wrought. It was over. Right?

And then the wind stopped. When she reached the Seym, all that remained of Baltael was a single speck of pink light, fluttering towards the sky. The golden room was strewn with the bodies of both Magesters and commoners, all with their souls ripped from them, with a curiously empty altar of sorts in the middle. *Its* work. One of the bodies lay on the floor, pupils soulless, hair and beard whiter than the purest soulthreads. He was clad in battered soulforged armor, his mouth gaping at the sky beyond the chamber's open ceiling. Oyva recognized him as Danyel, the headmaster of Edelia and Baltael's soulally. Or at least, what was left of him. Just an empty husk of a corpse. Forbidden magick. So he had sacrificed

himself, his very soul, to defeat *it*. Denied the possibility of an afterlife, of becoming an elemental spirit. He was brave. Or maybe he had nothing left to live for.

But then what of Baltael? The forbidden magick must have required Danyel's soul, but it should not have affected Baltael. He should still be here. He should be telling her about his grand battle, his sorrow of having lost his soulally, and his catharsis at having finally ended their father's existence. They should be finally moving on, together. The wind should still be flowing. The wind should still be whipping her mane about her face. The wind should still be caressing her feathers. Oyva searched and searched, sifting through the lingering magical chaos in the chamber, finally coming across another residue. It was hazy, through the echoes of the battle - or perhaps slaughter - that transpired, but there was the slightest hint of a reddish black soulthread. Or maybe two? One essence intertwined with another. Its color reminded her of burnt coals, and it exuded a scent so foul that blackness crept in around the edges of her vision. She could hardly make any sense of it. It was unlike any soulthread she had ever encountered, and before she could examine it any further, it faded from her grasp.

Oyva sat in the Seym for a time, taking stock of what remained in her life. What was left? Her brother Baltael, gone. Her sister Pandora, gone. *Nothing left to live for.* She was an elemental spirit. She would live on, presumably forever, like this. But there were ways to die. She knew well, as the original soulsmith. Ways to break down elemental spirits, to smith them into weapons and armor and trinkets. She was old and powerful, too fully formed for a single weapon, but she knew that she could do it, split herself apart until there was nothing left. She stared at Danyel's lifeless body. Baltael had been fond of him. He had been the soulally of many headmasters, but he had particular praise for Danyel, saying that he was a skilled weaver and fighter, and a knowledgeable and fair headmaster, despite how suddenly he was thrust into the position. And how ultimately short his term was, Oyva thought grimly. Baltael also told her stories of Danyel's quarrels with his brother. Tomix, was it? About their distance despite their great love for each other. They reminded Oyva of her own siblings, in a way. She gently scooped up Danyel. At the very least, she would return him to Edelia to be buried there. After that, she could decide what was worth living for.

Her meeting with the teachers went by in a haze. In the wake of both Danyel and Baltael's deaths, they offered her the position of interim headmaster, which she soundly refused, though they kept the offer open. She was a soulsmith, not a soulweaver. Yes, she occasionally helped Baltael administer the final exams, but this was his Edelia, not hers. She wandered listlessly through the ivy-crept halls, the purple flames of torches glaring down at her. She always hated that design choice. Too dark, too foreboding, too menacing, especially those glaring eyes. But Pandora had insisted. A bitter smile crept onto Oyva's face. The irony of it all. Every birthday growing up, her one wish was for a happy family. She saw the way her mother suffered. She was a young mother, far too young. Oyva remembered doing the math once, when she was old enough to understand, and she vomited on the spot. Her mother never showed them any love, but how could she? Oyva could not blame her for that. The only thing she saw in her mother's eyes was her hatred for *it*. She saw the way

Baltael strived to do something, anything that might garner *its* attention, or even love, as ridiculous as that sounded. *It* could not love. That was what Edelia was supposed to be. The first Soulweaving academy, to carry on the legacy of their family. Something to be proud of. She saw the way Pandora desperately rebelled, first honing her Soulweaving for combat, then branching off with her Chaosweavers, trying to make something, anything her own. How her loneliness drove her to eventually try to create her own family, shredding her soul and her life to do so. At the end of her mortal life, Oyva convinced herself that they would be able to try again. After all, they had an eternity as elemental spirits to be a proper family, didn't they? She did not realize that an eternity was so short.

Students hurried past her, giving her a wide berth, some of them giving a quick nervous bow while averting their eyes. She recognized some of them as students that she had failed in the recent final exams. Baltael had always admonished her for being too harsh on them, as well as scaring them with her animalistic head and armor. She reasoned that unprepared soulweavers would do more harm than good.

And she had a reputation to uphold, after all. Her wolf head was not just for show. Eventually her wanderings lead her to the headmaster's office. It was exactly the same as she remembered it, untouched by the wind. In the middle sat the headmaster's grand oaken desk, surrounded by bookshelves filled with tomes and pots and bottles of soulthreads. There were still parchments to be read and decrees to be signed. The eastern stone wall was lined with portraits of the academy's headmasters, starting with Baltael's human visage and ending with Zellaraneish and a clean-shaven Danyel. Behind the desk was another open window, offering views of the green courtyard below where students sat with their soulallies, practicing their weaving.

Oyva paced around the room. The easy thing to do, she mused, would be to return to soulsmithing. To lose herself in some remote corner of the Elemental Plane, collecting unformed elemental spirits, and to lose herself in the rhythm of her hammer beating down on whatever worthless piece she decided to make next. But perhaps... here. Here was something. Taking students and forging them into master soulweavers. Even expanding the academy to teach soulsmithing, as well. Edelia was her family's legacy. Edelia was something to be proud of. That should not change. It would be a long time, she knew. Being here, surrounded by Baltael's memory - it would get worse before it got better. But she owed it to him. He would be happy, knowing that she would carry it with her. Headmistress Oyva. Perhaps that was something to live for. Someday, the wind would flow through these halls, again.

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Greenguard Forest

Greenguard

Swordhaven

Relieved from their post at the Mana Core, Warlic, Jaania, and Alexander returned to where it all began: the city of Swordhaven. They were to be paraded, as *heroes*, with an entourage of royal knights, Guardians, Rose, and even the Hero of Falconreach and their dragon. As the three mages stood at the city gates, gazing up at its glittering spires, they were wracked with conflict. The three of them, heroes? In this place where they each caused such harm?

Once, Swordhaven was a haven for all, before Jaania turned it into her organization's magic-proof stronghold. Now, the Rose's magic-detection orbs were gone from the city gates. All the peoples of Greenguard were welcome in the capital again. The trio only just left the Core, and already Jaania saw how much better the world was after her defeat. The Hero raised their hand at the front of the entourage, and the gatekeepers stepped aside to let them through. They proceeded into the city, bustling with celebration. Their spell saved the world, she supposed, and maintaining it asked much of them. Recognition still felt... wrong, however. As the parade began, Alexander glanced over at her, tripping on the start of the cobblestones. At least she wasn't the only nervous one.

The parade proceeded into the city, and Alex was immediately struck by how little Swordhaven had changed in the hundreds of years he'd known it.

Sure, the banners decorating the walls changed – from the gaudy gold facade of the Slugwrath dynasty, to Alteon's equally-pretentious draconic emblem, briefly to Jaania's Rose, then back to the dragon again when Victoria Alteon took the throne. The city itself, though, from the buildings to the people, felt much the same as when he first arrived here as a student. Sturdy walls, beautiful white spires, neat cobblestones, the same sorts of shops. Maybe this was what happened when a city wasn't burned to the ground every decade or so. He certainly wasn't that same nervous country boy who first wandered into the city, though.

Their route was surrounded on both sides by celebrants, all there to see Warlic, Jaania, and, *himself* of all people. He'd worked so hard to market his villain persona over the years, then he went and started caring about people. For real, not just as things to possess. In protecting the handful of people who made life worth living, he accidentally saved everyone. He never went to the trouble of making a *hero* persona! What was he supposed to do, smile and princess-wave? ...He smiled, and princess-waved.

The celebrants were just as confused. Apparently the good people of Swordhaven never got the memo that their savior "Alexander" was actually the madman who decimated their military. Whenever their parade passed through a street and the people's eyes fell on him, marching alongside the illustrious Archmage and Archmagus, their faces cycled through horror, confusion, then, bewildered *acceptance*. He wasn't what they expected, but they just took it in stride. Was this something new about Swordhaven?

Alex glanced over at his friends. Jaania's smile was tense, a little

forced. She was used to playing the hero, but she'd only just accepted that she *wasn't* one. Warlic looked settled, at least. Alex leaned over. "Hey. Warlic. Are we doing this right?"

Warlic jumped. Maybe not. "Relax, would you? They're hardly an angry mob."

"Yeah that's *why* it's weird! Why do they like me all of a sudden?"

Jaania shushed them. "Project *confidence*." She decidedly did the opposite.

The Hero led them down an alley Warlic didn't recognize, despite his many trips to the city over the decades. Some of the Rose soldiers gave each other odd looks. In their whispers, Warlic caught the name: "Branden Quarter." He'd heard of it: the district where Swordhaven's poorest lived, and the site of much unrest during the height of the Rose's power.

The Branden Quarter was quite different from the Swordhaven Warlic knew. He was pampered as a student, and an honored guest of the crown in the years before the Rose. Here, the marble-white streets were stained with grime and mouldering trash. The people on the streetsides of Branden looked weary, their hands worn from hard labor. But they smiled at Warlic and his friends all the same. They carried a hope, a strength within them, stoked at the sight of the parade. It was an odd feeling. He'd never thought himself a folk hero.

As Alex could attest, there was a time when he sneered at the common Lorean. To the onlookers, he was the wise Blue Mage, one of their heroes who spent years protecting them from the erupting core of the planet. They'd never know how cruel he'd been.

They emerged from Branden into a courtyard hugged by an old oak, in the shadow of a great tower. This place was once the Magic Academy of Swordhaven, then the Ivory Tower, headquarters of the Rose. As they crossed the courtyard, their audience seemed to fade away. This was their old home, the place where they met, where it all went wrong, and where Jaania based her misguided crusade. She spent so much of her life imprisoned here. First by the others, then by her obsession. Alexander lost himself here, twice, and Warlic nearly did the same. Before a phantom chill could set in, Jaania's friends matched her stride, their presence a warm bonfire. For all the hurt wrapped up in this tower, it still felt like home.

She'd been shocked to learn the Rose was not disbanded after her defeat, merely restructured. She once would've been proud to call the organization her legacy. For years she was content to pretend its corruption wasn't there, that the Rose *protected* the people of Greenguard. Through her convenient ignorance, she brutalized a continent. She didn't create a monster she couldn't control: she simply grew so self-righteous that she didn't even try. How could this cult built on the hollow foundation of her ego persist, when even she could see its rot?

The new Archmagus, Hansa, awaited them at the tower's imposing doors. Hansa confronted Jaania about the cracks in the Rose's ideals many times over the years. For her trouble, Jaania nearly had her

killed. The Greenguard Alliance was all that spared her old friend from her assassin's arrow. She was ever the leader Jaania fancied herself to be. If there was any good within the Rose, any hope for Jaania's naive vision, Hansa was the woman to find it.

Archmagus Hansa turned towards Jaania, facing her directly through the crowd of observers. Jaania's magic was distinct, she knew, and while the Archmagus never met her gaze, Jaania could feel her cool acknowledgement. She looked older, wiser, tired. After a beat, she smiled, fond and at ease, greeting an old friend. Something in Jaania shattered. She had to reach out, apologize, thank her, do *something*, but the entourage kept marching. Jaania's gaze lingered as they moved on to the Castle square.

The royal family, that is, Queen Victoria Alteon and her sisters, awaited them before the castle gates. Their father was notably absent. Warlic remembered when the revolutionaries, Lynaria, Valen, and Alden upended the long-standing Slugwrath line and put an end to King Dethrix's tyranny. In Warlic's long life, King Alteon's reign felt like only yesterday, but the mortal world was quick to change. Queen Victoria already established herself as an authority to rival her father, especially after bringing the Rose to heel. She waved to her people with a sincere, proud smile, and ignored their parade until her prickly-looking attendant nudged her. Princess Brittany watched from a wheelchair at Victoria's side, her posture hale and regal. She'd declined the throne, in the interest of stability and with the utmost faith in her sister.

The youngest princess, Tara, was swept up in the excitement – particularly in staring at the odd flaming creature at the heart of the parade – and far less concerned with appearances than her sisters. She radiated a peculiar, saturated mana akin to his own. Each princess held immense potential and resolve within them, befitting heroes of the next age. Warlic hoped he would be among those trusted to guide them.

Alex was sure the parade would end there, but the Hero kept moving, so he and his companions followed. They passed through the market, which had changed remarkably little since his days as a student. The sewers he used to train in were padlocked shut, and there was a new odd jobs board for fledgling adventurers to occupy themselves with instead. He'd pried himself out of Snapperdilla jaws more than once in his apprentice days, so that was probably for the best. Once upon a time Xan favored weeding out the weak, but he was a softy these days. Why not give more wannabe heroes a fighting chance? Who knows where they could end up.

The Hero led them into the Residential District, their audience growing denser as they walked the meandering streets. So many people, all looking at Jaania, at them, the same way they did the Hero of Falconreach. The admiration she once craved made her sick. She stared at the cobblestones, her false confidence depleted.

She recognized this street. It dead-ended on a plot of land once scarred by a burned house with a charred journal. The plot remained untouched for centuries, out of fear of a fiery curse. When her Rose occupied the city, Jaania had the ruins cleared and replaced with a rose garden. She left it otherwise unremarkable, intentionally so.

Why would the parade bring them here? The townsfolk formed a loose semicircle around the garden, giving them space as the parade finally reached its end. In place of a ruin, or a curse, or a lonely void...

A statue of three friends, resplendent with eternal ice and fire, honored in the place that once marked their tragedy.

Jaania's words failed her. Her friends, too. The Hero gave them a beaming smile as the celebrations faded into soft, nearly reverent chatter. She realized she was shaking. She hoped it was ice she felt on her cheeks, not tears.

Warlic recovered first. "To think we would all be honored here together. I couldn't ask for a greater legacy."

"This is wrong," Jaania's voice trembled. "First a parade, now a monument. We're not... *I'm* not a hero. What of everyone we hurt? I nearly brought Lore to its knees. What came after... it was what anyone would do. I don't deserve to be honored."

"Maybe that isn't the point," She would've brushed Warlic off, once, but she'd learned to trust his wisdom. "That day, you chose to seal yourself away and save the world, even though it wouldn't undo your mistakes, and we followed you. We showed the world that it's never too late to change, that anyone can choose to be a hero. That is what this statue is for, I think. *Inspiring* people."

Jaania scanned the crowd, their city brought together by their deeds. She saw children, dragons, Ateala, knights and Rose, the flutter of Kara's emerald wings, the Professor's dour old apprentice, and Amadeus with a young girl perched upon his shoulders. And she believed him.

Alex crossed in front of her, entranced. He ran a hand along his statue's carved robe. "I look different."

Warlic studied the statue. "Very. How did the sculptors decide on this likeness, I wonder?"

Alex had a right to the truth, embarrassing as it was. "I once peered into a world in which nothing horrible ever happened to us. This is what you would've looked like if you were never burned. Someone must've found my... illustrations."

"...You drew me?"

"We should have it changed. The people should know the real face of their savior." She smiled at Alex, the real Alex. "The fire, *magic*, didn't ruin you. The tragedy you survived in this world didn't stop you from becoming a hero, in the end."

"...Nah. I like it. It's a gift from a friend."

The Shears

N
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S

Braughlmurk

Popsprocket

YIX APPROVE

WOW

NEW

The Technomancer Glove!

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Address_____
Number of Gloves*_____
***One screwdriver per order.**
Yix is not responsible for any damages from Tog, Flying Eyeball, or drone delivery services.

*Not To Scale.

Fairglade

Sunbreeze Grove

It is dark by the time Dove arrives in Sunbreeze Grove, the sky's colours long since faded from the moon's wake. The stars dance in their distant way. The lake sloshes.

Even with moon and starlight illuminating the path, the darkness is more present than he expected. He blames his recent time in Falconreach for that; so many of the rebuilding efforts have centred around minimising the presence of darkness as much as possible. More lamps along the paths, brighter lights shining out of windows, several varieties of bioluminescent plant introduced... after what they went through in the Calamity, he can't blame them but it seems it's going to take a while for his eyes to readjust to typical night-time.

The darkness ahead is the cool, comforting dark typical of a calm night. Two lights stand out in it – a dimly lit window, the light coming from deeper within the building, and a bright lantern by the door.

He wonders if the Priestess knew to expect him today or if she simply always leaves out a lantern for wayward guests.

At least it's not his *fault* he's so late. He left Falconreach with *plenty* of time – even asked around for directions and then doubled the travel time to account for any shenanigans that might show up on the way. Unfortunately, even with that preparation – he gathers a few handfuls of his hair and starts squeezing methodically – nobody thought to mention the *boat*.

He'd saved the poor boatman the trouble and just walked straight into the water when he saw it. It was supposed to be faster than going around but, unfortunately, the lake's bed had proven itself much more difficult to navigate than its surface.

Dove's sodden slippers squelch as he approaches the door. A small puddle drips into place around his feet as he knocks.

The Priestess Elysia answers it with a smile.

"I've been keeping a pot of tea warm," she says. "It'll help you warm up."

--

The afternoon breeze ruffles the hair of Elucidas's human form as he wanders the trees. Sunbreeze Grove is, as ever, peaceful and welcoming. The young priestess tends it well, following faithfully in her mentor's footsteps. He has told her as much over one of their regular afternoon teas; she thanked him and admitted to worrying still about how best to honour the Lady's memory. He told her that he doubted there exists any way she could fail to do so, allowing, of course, for the exception of if she should let anything happen to the tea bushes. The joke had earned some much needed mirth for them both.

Leaves flutter from overhead, accompanied by the *whoosh* of displaced air and the drifting laughter of Creatioux children. It does his heart good to hear. It had been no easy choice to abandon the Clarionwood as the shadow of the Rose grew ever longer but his people truly could have found no greater sanctuary.

And, he muses, he could not have found a better friend, in these times far from home. It is an incomparable comfort to have someone he can talk of his homesickness with, who understands the longing but to whom he is not the Elder to look to.

Perhaps it is these thoughts that lead his feet to the Grove's garden, where its caretaker sits in a weathered chair at a garden table with a pot of tea.

"Elucidas!" Elysia says, looking up from her cup. "It's good to see you! Would you like some?"

"It would be a pleasure," he replies, taking the seat across the table. Elysia pours him a cup and he sips it slowly. It is almost, but not quite, the Lady's blend. He suspects he knows who prepared it.

There is a coolness joining the air now, as the day moves on. The warmth of the cup in his hands is a balm. Some things, he thinks, stay the same even as they change.

--

The noon sun hangs high in the sky through the window and Elysia wishes she could feel half as bright.

The most annoying part is that she had been having a good week. Her studies have been making progress, all has been well in the Grove, and no dire news has come from the world beyond. She hasn't even had any magical mishaps lately.

And so, of course, she had to wake up this morning with the hollow ache back in her chest in place of her heart, pulsing *I want to go home, I want to go home, I want to go* ***home.***

It will pass, as it always does, but until then she has to cope with being stuck on the verge of tears all day. She scrubs at her eyes stubbornly. There's no reason for this; she *wants* to be here, she chose this path and way of life, and this petulant part of her heart that keeps crying to run home to Momma and Papa needs to *catch* up. Ideally, it needs to catch up in the next thirty seconds and let her work on her studies. She would much rather be learning more about draconic primal elements instead of desperately trying not to cry because of things like thinking about Papa's laugh for a few seconds too long or thinking Momma would like the view from her window.

"Elysia?"

She startles, turning in her chair to face the door. "Lady Celestia! I was just-"

Her mentor smiles and gently gestures with the almost-ever-present tea cup in her hand. It's empty.

"I was about to put a fresh pot on. I wondered if you might like to join me? I received a new blend recently from a friend in Dragonsgrasp and I thought you might like to try it."

"Oh," Elysia says. "Yes, I'd like that."

She stands from her desk and follows her mentor to the kitchen.

The tea tastes like home.

--

Morning in Sunbreeze Grove is *blinding*. The sun rises all the way into the sky, every day, and stays there for *hours*, making the light practically inescapable. It makes the sky *blue*, of all colours. In Artix's opinion, it is unnerving and unnatural.

Not that it particularly matters to him *today*. He has the curtains of the room drawn – the thicker ones that Miss Celestia gave him after the first few days, to better block out the light – and a thick blanket over his head and he will not be moving from this position.

His limbs are far too heavy today to deal with the light as well as the burden of existing today. With the assurance that Miss Celestia's dragon friends can and will eat anything in the woods that wants to eat anyone in the Grove, he's perfectly safe to just curl up in his shadowed cocoon and stay there forever. He is not entirely sure if he *wants* to stay forever yet but at least he has the option. No dangers beyond the walls, no chores to do, no wood to cut. No reasons at all to fight the weight in his heart instead of staying where it's safe and comfortable.

A knock at the door interrupts his vegetating.

"Artix?" calls Miss Celestia's voice. "How are you feeling today?"

He does not answer. She comes in anyway. The bedframe creaks as she sits. An odd scent follows her in.

"I brought some tea," Miss Celestia says. "Even if you don't feel up to food, you should at least drink it. It's chamomile – soothing."

Artix sighs into the mattress and forces his body up to a sitting position. The blanket slips off of his head and pools on his shoulders like a cape. He has, by now, learned that Miss Celestia is very stubborn when it comes to tea. He blinks at her and hopes it will convey *you gave me tea yesterday. And the day before. And the day before that.*

"It's good for you," she says, simply, holding the cup out to him.

He heaves another sigh and takes it from her.

It tastes better than yesterday's cup.

--

A gentle breeze rustles the leaves in the canopy, allowing the first breaking rays of dawnlight to filter through. It highlights the calm of the clearing she's found, the same way the near-but-distant sound of a lapping lakeshore does. It is greatly overgrown, in a way that suggests a garden once-well-tended and now abandoned. Overhead, the dawn chorus begins, cheeping and chirping.

Celestia, neither yet Priestess nor Lady, breathes in deeply, filling her lungs. Already, she feels steadier than she did, surrounded by the peace of nature. ...Steady enough to admit to herself that there are better ways to end an argument than storming out of a room via untargeted teleportation, even. Maybe as far as to say steady enough to soon head back and make the apologies she owes.

It was a rather ridiculous argument to begin with.

First, though, a *quest*. She caught a particular scent on the breeze with that deep breath and she can smell it still. Somewhere amongst the tangled mass of plant-life before her lies the most important plant of all – a tea bush. Maybe even more than one.

She rolls up her sleeves and dives in with glee. Pushing and shoving her way through branches and vines – a little rough, perhaps, but plants are tough, they can take it – she can almost see the shape of the garden this once was in how the plants have spilled over, and lets that guide her until, finally-

"Yes!" she cheers, setting her eyes and hands on tea leaves.

Much more carefully than she handled the other plants, she harvests enough for a cup and wiggles her way back out of the thicket. There are new green stains on her robes and scratches on her skin and she doesn't care one bit because she has *tea*.

It's a simple matter to call her travel tea set to her, the magic responding quickly and efficiently. She sets it up by the edge of the trees, where she can see the lake and the sky, sitting cross-legged on the ground. She sets aside the pot and cups for now and reaches for the wooden board she uses for preparing fresh leaves. Carefully, she arranges them so as to respond best to the next steps. Then, she shuffles back a little, breathes deeply again, holds out her hands, and lets her magic work.

Celestia is *so* glad for the existence of magic; with all the steps involved in preparing tea leaves, even the drying alone would take intolerably long by non-magical means. With magic to hand, it takes only a few minutes.

She brews the cup eagerly and savours the first sip. It's a delicious tea. Above her, the dawn grows brighter, painting the sky with many colours.

This is a lovely little grove that she's found. It would be nice to come back; maybe she could try and rescue that garden.

N
W
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Oaklore Forest

Arbor Forest

Oaklore

Sulen'eska

Toglandia

Oaklore

Rose<3
Oaklore Keep

Sulen'eska

THE TOGS OF TOGLANDIA

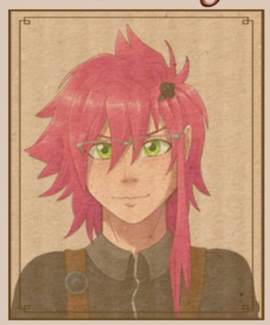
1. Common Tog feeding on a Moglin. The diet of the Tog consists of literally anything; 2. Newly hatched Togletts, toothless and useless, very cute; 3. Purple Swamp Tog allows a small avian to clean its mouth; 4. Mama Tog stores her Togletts in her mouth. She may forget and eat them; 5. A very tiny Tog, holding a Dragon Coin for scale; 6. Mimicry Togs play a fundamental role as pollinators in their ecosystem; 7. A Fluffy Tog's front visage, claimed by many to inflict curses; 8. The Togoboros, perpetually chasing its own tail; 9. God.

Odd Jobs Board

LOST

Named Ptoleme, answers to nothing. ~~Will bite.~~
If found, return to ~~Rogue.~~ Zhoom

Missing



Tek
Last name unknown

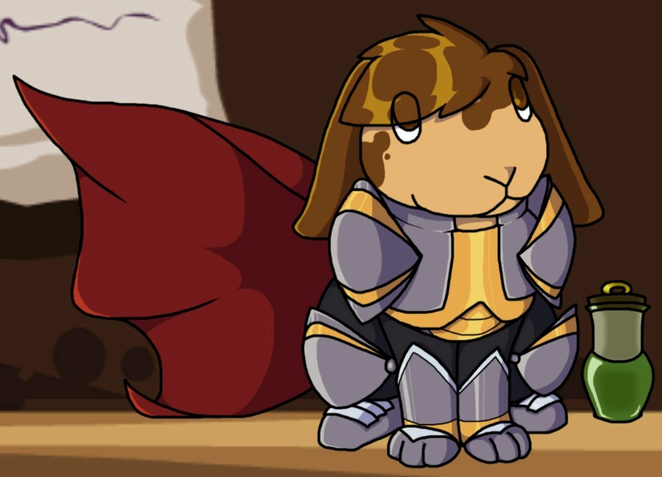
If you have any information, please contact Big Daddy in the Forest Of Infinite Terror

Have you seen them?

Now you have!!!

Save the Blorbos from the Mana Core Fund!

Please send donations of Gold and DragonCoins to Villain Rehab Tower in Falconreach!



WANTED:

Assistance in the retrieval of rare academic documents from the Sandsea area; further details to be provided upon acceptance of request. See Grimmorris for details.

Mercenary For Hire

Will take any job (within reason)
Half the gold paid upfront, the other half once the job has been completed
Ask for FEATHER

N
W
E
S

Doomwood Forest

Doomwood

The Necropolis

"Faye, you know the professor said she's going to use *you* in her next lesson if you're late to class again,"

The grating voice yoinks Faye from her blissful sleep, and she lets out an agonized groan that wouldn't be out of place among the undead. Perhaps an inevitability of her constant proximity to them. Curse her for taking such an early class, especially one that she couldn't just sleep her way through.

Stupid *Home Necronomics*. Why did she even need that for her degree? She was a STEM major for Darkness's sake.

Faye can hear the eye roll in her roommate's voice. "Whatever. Be that way. But if she asks where you are, I'm telling her you couldn't bear to drag your sorry butt out of bed,"

Huffing, Faye throws the covers off herself. "Fine, I'm up, I'm up!" *You dirty snitch,* she adds privately.

Faye sits up and scrubs crust from her eyes, then sees Termina ready for class, makeup immaculate, their braids done up in a bun. Ugh. They'd probably been up for hours already. That was Faye's other mistake: rooming with a *morning person*. (Or whatever passed for a morning person in a land of eternal night. *Semantics.*)

Faye gets herself out of bed and stretches, enjoying the feeling of her muscles loosening up after hours in an uncomfortable position. See, this is why she'll never go for lichdom. Necromancer be damned, Faye enjoys the little things that make *her* feel alive.

Hurrying, Faye goes about her morning routine at a record breaking pace. She even manages to scrape some of the 'blindingly bright' green eyeliner she favors into decent wings on both eyes.

"How're we doing on time?"

"Oh, we're just about in time for them to start serving breakfast," Termina says with a smirk badly concealed by the book they've been browsing through.

...

"*Breakfast?*"

"You know, the most important meal of the day? Pancakes, chickencow omelets, and the like?"

"I know what breakfast *is!* You said I was going to be late for class, Mina!" Faye gesticulated with her hands to keep her from using them to wring the other necromancer's neck. She could've slept in another *hour.*

Closing the book with a satisfying *thump,* Termina keeps their face in that coy little smirk. "Just making sure, as I never see you eating it. And no, those disgusting protein potions you drink do not count,

I swear the zombies eat a more balanced diet than you,"

Faye's actually out of those, now that she thinks about it, which is a bummer; there's nothing she wants more than to chug one right in front of Mina's face.

"So, shall we go eat?"

It's too late for Faye to crawl back into bed now. Curses, if she'd just *looked at the clock* instead of going on Mina's word...

Sighing, Faye nods. "Yeah, I guess. *Does* the caf have omelets today?" she cocks an eyebrow up. That sounds pretty good right about now.

"I'm actually not sure, I believe a lot of the ingredients are being repurposed for that zombie food experiment,"

"Ugh. Of course. Stupid culinary majors..."

-

Begrudgingly, Faye admits getting through Home Necronomics is leagues easier when she's got food instead of jitter-inducing potion in her stomach. She even gets a "You're improving, Ms. Tall," from the professor for her trouble, which is the only nice thing the lady's *ever* said about her.

She won't be admitting that Mina is right to her face though.

The extra energy will do her well for her TA gig in the Body Shop that she's got up next, for sure. Being extra alert in class full of freshmen that can barely manage control of a skeleton for longer than five minutes is *never* a bad thing.

Honestly, this class is downright sad. By this time in her first year, Faye could make the skeletons do a dance routine. These kids can't even keep them from trashing the...

...Was that smoke billowing from the Body Shop?

Yes. Yes it was.

Out from the smoke came a bunch of faces she vaguely recognized as the class before hers, coughing on the fumes and waving it away from their faces.

Faye intercepted one of the students. "What happened?"

"New kids got into a fight with the creature they made and *completely destroyed* the lab," they reply. "Professor Skullface doesn't know how long it's going to take to fix, which is a pain, because I really need the credits from this lab-"

...It's also a pain for Faye, as she feels quite safe assuming she's out of a TA job for the foreseeable future. What was the professor thinking, taking on new students *this* far into the semester?

Well. She pinches her nose. Not much that can be done. She'll...figure that out later.

It opens up the next period for her though. Faye debates what to do with the free time. She could take a nap, but she doesn't feel the need for one today.

After some wandering, Faye ends at the campus library. She's got a big exam this week she could study for. Ooor, she could bother Mina. This is their designated study time and Faye knows exactly where they'll be.

Whistling, Faye climbs the stairs and finds Termina tucked away in the back, scribbling and then erasing something furiously.

"Avatars, I hope that textbook's not a rental," Faye announces her presence and gawks. "You've really done a number on it,"

"Magic, Faye," Termina reminds her, rolling their eyes. (Faye's not sure even magic could salvage the page they're on, but okay.) "Don't you have a class to help teach?"

"Nah, Body Shop exploded," Faye drops into the window seat next to Termina and rifles through her bag, pulling out one of the apples she'd snagged from breakfast before *they* got commandeered too.

"What."

"Body Shop exploded, Mina. Kinda speaks for itself," Faye bites into the apple with a loud crunch that makes Termina cringe. With a mouthful, she continues. "Some freshmen screwed up, and y'know I was just thinking about how this year's students need to get their act together-"

Faye continues to yammer in Termina's ear, ignoring the scowl and narrowed eyebrows. She came here to *bother* her roomie after all. So, as revenge for this morning, she'll be doing just that.

...That is, until they threaten to practice individual body part animation by clamping a severed hand over Faye's mouth.

It is not an empty threat.

Faye's annoying, not stupid, so she relents and gets to work on her own studying. She's hardly as laser focused as Termina though, her attention occasionally drifts outside to people watch.

...Wait a sec. She squints at a pair that stick out like sore thumbs. To *her* anyway, if not the students mingling around them, paying no mind. You don't see a lot of armor on the *living* at Necro U. And you don't see armor that shiny at all.

"...Hey, Mina?" Faye nudges them with her elbow, glancing from the window to them.

They sigh and don't look up from the large tome they're annotating "Yes?"

"Hey uh...remind me what paladins are usually like?"

Behind their glasses, Termina's eyes narrow and shift over to Faye.

"Typically they are overly muscular, don ornate armor that would cost the average Greenguardian half a life's wage, and have a demeanor of a self righteous golden retriever. Why?"

"Termina, look out the window," Maybe she's just hallucinating, that would be fantastic actually, instead of-

"That's a *paladin!*" Termina loses their composure, their eyes looking about to pop out of their skull. "I've been saying they need to actually *hire* a gatekeeper instead of using that idiotic construct, but of course that's not in the *budget*, and *now* look!"

Faye really does not want to deal with this.

"...Say, Mina, it's nice out today, isn't it?"

Exasperated, Termina shakes their head. "Faye, first of all, we're underground, it's always the *same* outside, second, why are you engaging in small talk when there's a pala-"

"It's a *really nice day out*, it'd be a shame to waste it *cooped up* wouldn't it?" Faye continues, enunciating each word, staring Termina directly in the face until the lightbulb goes off in their head.

"...Ah. Yes. Yes it would," Termina agrees, slowly, catching on to what Faye actually meant. "In fact, it's been a while since we've been to the surface, hasn't it? I could use some...*things* from Moonridge,"

"Yeah. You know, it might be nice to stay up there for a bit, wouldn't it?" Faye has no idea how things are going to pan out with that paladin and his friend roaming around, but Faye *does* know she absolutely does not want to hang around and find out."We should pack some things, make a nice trip out of it,"

"What's a few days of missed classes? I'm sure we can make the work up," And if *that* didn't spell that Termina was expecting disaster... Normally they'd miss class over their own dead body. And, let's be honest, they probably have a safeguard to resurrect themself and be able go to class anyhow.

"Let's go. Right now," Faye throws her stuff into her bag. Termina follows suit with a frazzled efficiency, not even bothering to keep their papers from getting crumpled up.

One might have a lot to say about Faye and Termina getting out of the Necropolis as soon as possible, and not *warning* anyone about what was happening. Both of them, however, came to the conclusion that if everyone else was stupid enough to let that guy wander around, then they had whatever plans he had for the university coming to them.

So, instead, Faye and Termina have a lovely week up in Moonridge together, enjoying the shopping and food enough to almost forget why they'd come. They don't hear hide nor hair of anything happening to the Necropolis, the only notable goings-on being that someone's daughter is missing. And as Faye points out to the frantic mother putting up posters and asking her to keep an eye out, that's probably because poor little Sally wound up as wolf food.

She did not find this as helpful as Faye thought she would. Man, you try to save someone some time and effort...

After *that*, Mina decides it's about time they head out and see what happened down there, before folks realize they're necromancers and run them out of town. And before they get in *real* trouble for their extended absence...

When they complete their trek back down to the university, they find it absolutely devoid of students, faculty, or even undead.

"You know Mina, I don't think anybody's going to notice we were gone," Faye puts her hands on her hips, scanning the campus for any sign of life, or unlife. There's not a one. Welp.

"I was supposed to *graduate* this year," Termina bemoaned, putting their head in their hands. They look at Faye with desperation in their eyes. "Do you know if Necromancy State lets you transfer credits?"

"I don't know that there's uh, anyone left here to transfer the credits Mina," Faye pats them on the shoulder. This does not help. Quite the opposite. It sets Termina off, rambling about what they're going to do with their life now. (Faye's gonna let that sink in for *her* later.)

"*Avatars*, I should've just gone to mage school, why didn't I listen to my mother?"

"Cause your mother *sucks*. Come on. We can head to Amityvale or maybe even somewhere out of Doomwood and figure it out from there. It could be worse,"

"*How* could this be any worse,"

"We could've gotten smited by a paladin, Termina. Or is it smote?"

"...I don't know, actually," Termina muses, then sighs. "I suppose you're right. But you're buying me an *entire* bottle of moglinberry juice at the next inn we hit so I can mourn almost four years of education wasted properly,"

That's fair.

"Deal,"

Amityvale

As much as Neron would have liked to be able to keep a close eye on Thursday for the duration of her recovery, his responsibilities as the highest member of the Rose in Amityvale kept him frequently busy, limiting him to quick check ins on her health and progress.

This, he thinks now, may have been a mistake.

The cat looks at him innocently from Thursday's lap even as she smiles, petting its head.

"This is Verlyrus," Thursday says. "He sometimes comes to keep me company."

"Verlyrus," Neron echoes, the name sounding... almost familiar. Almost.

Thursday nods, still petting the cat that Neron is not entirely convinced is a cat. "He's a very good listener. And his fur is quite soft."

Verlyrus meows, and if Neron didn't know any better he might think that the cat sounds *smug*.

— — — — —

It becomes increasingly clear as time goes on that the cat, Verlyrus, is not a normal cat. It is too intelligent, too clever, seemingly able to understand not only when it is spoken to but also the words that are being spoken, to a degree that a normal cat most certainly would not be capable.

Thursday, unfortunately, adores it, and Neron cannot quite blame her for it. The comfort the cat must have provided during her recovery certainly could not be dismissed, and it was not unusual that Thursday would get... attached.

But that does not make *dealing* with the cat easier.

If anything, it makes it more difficult, for the cat seems to delight in the occasional opportunity to be... well, to be an utter menace.

— — — — —

If there is but one good thing brought about by the (admittedly uneasy) ceasefire between various parties in the Doomwood, it is that Neron has far more time now for his research into cures for both lycanthropy and vampirism, among other projects.

Swirling the contents of a glass vial carefully, he sets it in a rack of similar vials, all with rare samples he is currently running an experiment on, then turns back to his mircoscope to examine one of the slides he has just finished preparing.

There is a soft, almost imperceptible sound, and he almost ignores it, if not for a sudden bad feeling that has him looking up.

Neron stares.

Verlyrus stares back, frozen with one paw outstretched towards the rack of rare samples.

"Verlyrus," Neron says calmly. Carefully. "I would ask you to consider this."

Verlyrus looks to him, looks to the rack, looks back to him, and then gives a single, mischievous meow.

Neron moves, but it is already too late. The paw shoves the entire rack off the desk in a cascade of clinking glass upon wood, and then Verlyrus *bolts*, and Neron is forced to choose between salvaging his samples and chasing after the frustrating cat.

Sighing, he goes to retrieve his spare vials and several pipettes.

This is the third time this week.

(It is Tuesday.)

— — — — —

The full moon has come and gone once more, which means it's safe for Raven to be in Amityvale, and after dropping off a letter from Chaney with Neron she heads over to see Thursday.

Unfortunately, Thursday is with The Cat again.

Raven knows, truly, that there is no *logical* reason for her to dislike The Cat as much as she does, but there's just something about it that, were she a wolf, would have her bristling. That sometimes has her bristling even when she *isn't* a wolf.

Today, Thursday is reading a book with The Cat in her lap, petting its head and scratching behind its ears. Something that might be jealousy rears up inside Raven, a brief thought that *she* should be the one getting head scratches, and then she freezes and reassesses that thought because it is not a normal human thought to have. Lingering wolf instincts, maybe? She'd have to ask Chaney.

That's when Thursday notices her though, and smiles, and Raven smiles back at her friend, and it really is nice to be in Amityvale again.

Except The Cat ruins it by making a disgruntled noise and butting at Thursday's hand until she chuckles and resumes petting it.

Sighing, Raven plops down beside Thursday. "It feels like you've always got this cat with you these days."

"Verlyrus isn't always around," Thursday says, sounding a little amused. "He's a very independent cat, though it's nice of him to keep me company."

"I can keep you company," Raven points out, only slightly grumpy.

"I appreciate when you do." There's a soft smile on Thursday's face.

"But I know you have your responsibilities, and I wouldn't wish to keep you from them."

"You could keep me from them a little."

Thursday blinks, and then her smile brightens, and Raven finds her face growing warm. She leans in a bit, and Thursday does the same, and—

And then *The Cat* gives a loud meow and steals Thursday's book, dashing away.

"Hey!"

"Verlyrus!"

— — — — —

"The final casualty count of the incident was...?"

"Three twisted ankles, five smashed pumpkins, a pair of shattered pots, and a moglinberry pie knocked from a windowsill, sir."

Neron sighs. "Did they at least retrieve Thursday's book?"

"...No, sir. And the cat managed to trip the mayor into the mud."

"Of course he did."

— — — — —

The smell of herbs and garlic and carefully cooked meat fill the air as Adrian takes the roast duck from the oven to add to the table, skin a crisp and golden brown, still sizzling slightly. It joins warm pumpkin bread and baked apples, fresh picked collard greens and spinach, all arrayed on the table for the nicer meal his family has once a week. Standing back, he looks on it with satisfaction, then turns when he hears the door open, face brightening as he walks away.

"Mother! Welcome home!"

Harkness smiles from the entryway, lowering her hood as Ramona does the same behind her. "Adrian! How was the inn, today?"

"The same as usual," he says easily. "The shift at the Graveyard?

"The same as always," his mother says with a smile, and Ramona nods.

"No trouble at all."

"That's good." His smile doesn't dim at all. "I hope you're both hungry."

"I certainly am! It smells *wonderful*," Harkness says sincerely, but then there's a crash.

As one, the three turn.

On the table, a glass has been knocked over, and a wide-eyed cat

stares at them, one of the duck's legs in its mouth in mid-pulling motion.

A very *particular* cat.

"*Verlyrus*." Adrian says in tones of frustration, familiar with the cat from its visits with Thursday during her recovery.

The cat bolts, pulling the leg entirely from the body with a sharp yank before fleeing through a nearby window, sending the basket of pumpkin bread scattering and knocking over the bowl of leafy greens in his flight, gone before anyone can stop him.

Ramona huffs.

— — — — —

Setting down a shallow saucer of cream, Thursday gives her friend an amused look. Verylrus just looks back innocently before moving to lap at the cream.

"There is a difference between simple mischief and actively causing problems, Verlyrus," she chides lightly.

Verlyrus meows, an offended sort of sound, as if to scold Thursday for even *suggesting* he'd cause such problems.

"Raven woke up with a mouse on her pillow again," Thursday points out with quirked lips. "I don't believe she appreciated it very much."

Verlyrus lets out a *mrrp*, eyes sparkling with amusement.

"You are both friends to me, you know. You don't have to fight about it."

The noise Verlyrus makes now is less meow and more huff, looking skeptical, and Thursday shakes her head and holds out a hand, which the cat rubs against immediately.

"I know you will do what you will, as cats always do, but if you could consider giving my other friends a break, I would be grateful." She scratches behind his ears carefully.

Verlyrus meows in a considering fashion.

— — — — —

The next morning, the mayor awoke to a mouse on *his* pillow. The screech was heard halfway across town.

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Golden Dunes

Sandsea

Atrea

Duat

Duat

entropienn
[Dec], 2025
Do not re-upload
Do not use for training AI models

Atrea

Sho'Nuff

Ruins Of Kordana

Her first thought, when she finally comes back online, is that she does not recognize this planet that she's crash landed on. The plants are unfamiliar to her, the birds that have taken up residence in a broken corner of her engine do not spark any memories, even the sky is a shade of blue not found in the sector of the galaxy she last remembers being in. She is hesitant to scan outwards, in case she alerts the Shadowscythe to her presence. So she waits for aid, for mercy, for anything. Slowly, night falls, and she turns her cameras skyward, hoping to at least use the stars for guidance. She is hopeful when she recognizes a constellation; if she can see the twins then she's at least near where she thought she was. Then she grows confused as she recognizes another constellation, and another, and another. None of the constellations she finds should be visible at the same time of year, let alone from the same planet. She reorganizes her data, but she can find no answer that doesn't involve the galaxy rearranging itself. Then she remembers that final plan, and she fears it all went horribly awry.

-

Decades pass, alone, stuck on this planet she does not know, cannot know. She knows it is inhabited, largely by humans and other humanoids, but none she knows. A few find her, but fear and hesitation keep them from coming too near. Her scans are too limited in scale and scope to know for sure, but slowly new plants start to show up on the island she's on. She assumes they are brought by travelers, spreading from gardens into the forest that surrounds her. Slowly the vines creep, growing up trees, growing closer to her as the years pass. Eventually, the vines weave their way up through cracks in her hull, finding purchase where the elements have worn at her. That summer, she watches in delighted recognition as they bloom, small white flowers opening up. She remembers seeing towns gathered for festivals dedicated to the start of summer, heralded by these blooms. She stares at the flowers, wishing she had someone to share this joy with.

-

She is reminded of an old programming story, of a moth found in an early calculator, leading to the term 'bug' being used to refer to software errors. The story is apocryphal, of course; the term had been used long before the incident, but it's a fun story nonetheless. Her cameras focus back on the insect that prompted her reminiscing, not a moth, a damselfly, caught among her circuitry and wires. She watches as it tires, struggling to find its way out. As it slows, she scans it, able to take in the details on its wings, the segments that make up its body, the compound eyes that seem to look back at her through her lenses. She realizes with a start that she's seen this species of damselfly before, in a similar situation. She had landed on a planet for a covert mission and the local fauna had taken a particular interest in her, including the damselflies. The very same type of damselfly that now slowly walks along a wire, antennas waving. She smiles to herself as history repeats itself in this small, familiar way.

-

She is woken from her power-saving slumber by a long-dormant communication system getting pinged. She sends one back, desperate to finally see another like her after centuries. She wonders if whoever is pinging her just woke up, not daring to risk any

communication more advanced, more easily tracked. Her hope falters as the pings grow more frequent, sometimes not even waiting for her return ping. It dies when it enters scanning range. It wasn't a fear of detection that kept it from attempting to speak to her. It was a lack of ability. There was nobody reaching out, just a simple scanner, a technological dowsing rod. The human carrying it looks up, and up, not expecting to find something so big with this strange gadget. She turns her attention away from them, uncaring. As long as they don't damage her more than she already has been...

She dismisses the thought that being dismantled for scrap metal would be a kinder fate than centuries more of solitude. She has more hope in their success than that, in whatever form it may take now.

-

Her systems fail her. Her scans yield less data, her cameras are slow to turn, her doors jam in place. What concerns her most is her power generators. Her degrading functionality doesn't matter if she runs out of power. She'd try to repurpose her security bots, but with the ways in which their code has degraded, she fears they'd just destroy her remaining generator like they had most of her repair drones.

Her worrying is interrupted as someone bangs on her hull, trying to find a way in, desperately glancing behind him. Her entry hatch grinds open, surprising the stranger, who winces as it screeches with rust.

"Come inside, quickly."

The stranger looks around for the source of the voice, but follows the order as the sounds of the violent crowd that chases him draws nearer.

"Are you alri-i-i-"

Her voice glitches as she struggles not to reboot as she recognizes him. She's been alone for over 3000 years but she could never forget her captain.

"Thank you, whoever, wherever you are, for granting me shelter."

"Of course."

She runs a medical scan over him on instinct, pulling up his file. She's almost surprised at his missing arm, then she remembers she hasn't seen any technology advanced enough to replicate the prosthetic he had before. If only her medical bay hadn't taken the brunt of her crash...

"May I know your name? A-And where you are? It's strange, talking to thin air."

She hesitates a second, not nearly long enough for him to notice.
"My name is Kordana. Here, come this way..."

She leads him to the heart of the ship, where he'd spent so much time, and the room with one of her few functional holoprojectors. She flickers in as he enters the room, walking the perimeter on an unremembered instinct, hand brushing against worn control panels.

He comes to a stop in front of her hologram.

"It's nice to meet you, Kordana. I'm Cerin, a priest of Khazri."

He holds out his hand to shake hers, but she shakes her head.

"I can't I-" She reaches out, her hand passing through his.

"Are you some kind of illusion?"

"I- Yes, effectiv-"

She is cut off as the power fluctuates, lights and projection flickering wildly.

"Are you alright?"

"My power cells are running low and most of my generators no longer function. It is only a matter of time until I-"

She stops herself. He is no longer her captain, she cannot burden him with her problems.

"You need power?" He thinks for a long moment before coming to a decision. "I think I can help with that."

-

"A certain hero passed on a hello from you."

Her systems crash before she can truly register who her visitor is.

The mage shakes his head roughly as everything powers down, leaving him in silence. The whir of her processors turning back on seems all the louder for their momentary absence.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he says with an apologetic smile.

"I- It- You- How-" She doesn't know what to say first, her processors threatening to overheat with all the possibilities.

"I do remember you, and everything else from before," he tells her, turning to face one of her cameras. "I assume that's one of the things you wanted to ask me. Given how loud your fans are, you must have a lot."

"How did you get in here? I didn't sense you approach! Or enter, for that matter!"

He waves off the concern, "Peculiarity in the way I Reset. Tech doesn't like me much anymore; it tends to get a bit... explode-y. I'm sure you'll be fine, you can decide if you like me or not."

"Well that's an easy decision to make," she says, "I have been alone too long to turn away an ally."

"Whew," he pantomimes wiping sweat off his brow, "Here I was worried I'd lose one of my few chances to talk about Before."

"Are there really so few who remember?"

"So far it's you, me, Queen Safiria," he ticks them off on his fingers, "I think that's it."

"That is surprisingly few," she muses, skimming through her files for any information she retained on the erstwhile vampi-

"When did she become Queen?"

"Oh, sometime after the Reset. As it turns out, keeping most, if not all, of her vampiric prowess through the Reset made it pretty easy for her to become the vampire queen of Darkovia."

"Hm. Good for her."

"But, yeah," he taps his chin as he thinks, "I think a few others have vague memories. Warlic's seemed to recognize a few things but he's never been able to figure out from where. The hero's had a weird knack for knowing people's names before they meet them. Things like that. Nobody else with complete memories, though. At least not yet."

"It might be for the best. The past 5000 years have been incredibly lonely without anyone to talk to about everything."

"Well, I'm pretty much always down to reminisce, so, I'll stop by when I'm not busy."

"What do you do now, if you're not a ship... or... pilot... I seem to think you were both."

"More Reset weirdness, I'm afraid. Anyway, I spend a lot of time running experiments trying to figure just how weird I can make things. So far the answer is Very," he says with a grin bordering on manic.

"You will have to tell me about them, next time."

"I'll make sure to bring my notes. It was good to see you again."

"You as well, Sys-Zero."

"Oh, actually, it's Cysero, now. It had to be de-sci-fi-ed. Or fantasy-ified. One of the two."

Her processors nearly slow to a halt as she tries to parse that. "Okay... Not sure what that means, but okay..."

He waves his hand again, "Best not to question things too hard. It has a tendency to get confusing."

"Yeah, I've gathered that so far," she says, clearly tired of it, inasmuch as a digital being can be tired.

"It's A Lot!" He bounces on his feet, still energetic despite it all, "I'll give you some time to sort through it all."

"I think I need it," she admits, "Take care, Cysero."

"I'll see you later, Kordana."

Deadlands

Willowshire

Sepulchure's Fortress

Northlands
Dragonsgrasp
Dragesvard
Braughlmurk

Dragesvard

Dragonsgrasp

Breathe in, breathe out.

Vilmor stands on the edge of an icy cliff, eyes closed and feeling the wind ruffling her hair. She has specifically removed her helmet for this, wanting to feel the authentic experience of a first flight, like she had done years ago with Cryozen. Only this time... she opens her eyes and looks down, lips curving into a fond smile at the sight of the little blue baby dragon happily bouncing in the snow. Only this time, she will be flying on Cryozen Jr.

Far below them, the deep blue seas stretch out, dotted with icebergs, and high above them, the DragonLord fortress hovers, the place her ancestors built.

Her home.

Her prison.

Cryozen Jr crouches, wings perked and quivering slightly, and Vilmor is thrust back to being a pre-teen, looking up at an ancient and powerful creature, a dragon carved straight from a glacier, in the exact same position as his child is in now. A dragon who had looked down at her and told her she was worthy, not just of becoming a Speaker, but of becoming a DragonLord.

His DragonLord.

Vilmor kneels next to Cryozen Jr, gently rubbing the top of his head as he pushes up into her hand with a happy coo. While Cryozen had been fully grown when she met him, there's an almost fragility to his child, like newly formed ice versus the kind that has weathered centuries. A wave of protectiveness washes over her as she continues to pet him, this most precious of creatures. Maybe she could look into fashioning some armour for him, matching her own.

She already loves Cryozen Jr with all her heart, but she still misses Cryozen. He had known her, loved her, understood her in a way no one else had, not even Donovan, and when her first friend (her betrayer) had abandoned her and Dragonsgrasp in a fit of rage and jealousy, it had just been the two of them. Vilmor and Cryozen, Speaker and Great Dragon, DragonLord and dragon. Flying out to aid the people, the Order, or just to be together. Inseparable...until they weren't.

(And yet despite everything, he had tried to stop Frostscythe from hurting her, even weakened as he was, had shielded her with his wings as that cave collapsed, had breathed a last gentle stream of ice over her as he entrusted her with his heir.)

After the incident at Bask, when the DragonLords had come across Vilmor sat in the ruins of the Guardian Tower, too shocked to move or even speak, the pain of a strained bond (that at the time she thought had been broken) still thrumming through her, they had hauled her up with swords at her throat, bound her hands and marched her away to sit in that cage back in Dragonsgrasp.

But before all that, they had stripped her of her Dragon Amulet, and kept it who knows where.

The Amulet Cryozen had given her.

Suspiscion still ran deep within the Order, and despite her name having been cleared, her Amulet had not been returned to her; apparently she would have to 'earn' it back, if they ever did let her have it again.

A chirp brings her out of her thoughts, and she looks down to where Cryozen Jr has sat up, head cocked to one side inquisitively. And he's holding a Dragon Amulet in his mouth. Vilmor knows somehow, even before she bends down to scoop him up in her arms and take the Amulet, running her fingers across the silver dragon, the sapphire gem glinting in the winter sunlight.

She knows it's *her* Amulet.

Cryozen Jr coos as she holds him and the Dragon Amulet close to her, already feeling the love through their bond, reverberating through the Amulet, but there's still a familiar feeling in the background. There's still *Cryozen*, his love for his DragonLord and his child, still watching over them.

Vilmor inhales deeply as Cryozen Jr snuggles into her chest, letting the emotions wash over her, before opening her eyes again and looking down at him, scratching the top of his head. "Shall we go flying?"

Cryozen Jr wriggles happily as she gently places him back down, chirping as the magic of the Dragon Amulet washes over him, wings spreading as his form lifts and glows, a flash of pale blue light revealing his titan form. And he's so similar to his sire, the hue of his scales, the way his horns curl, the way he affectionately pushes his head against her side. But he's also *himself*, arched like an ice sculpture rather than the more stocky glacial form of Cryozen, more horns, and shards of ice running down his back, the same as the ones that are beginning to poke up in his baby form.

Vilmor cradles his head to her before stepping back, Cryozen Jr settling down to allow her to grasp onto his scales and swing herself onto his back, at the base of his long neck with the ice shards at her back. He rises again once she is settled, spreading those great blue wings and waits, waits for her to lean down and whisper in draconic.

"*Fly.*"

It's hard to describe exactly the sensation of dragonflight, the feeling of the wind rushing across you, the beating of your dragon's wings around you, how their muscles shift as they push through the air. In their first flight together, Cryozen had guided her on how to move with him as he flew, how to sense the wind currents, how to fly as *one*, DragonLord and dragon. And now she guides Cryozen Jr, imparting his sire's lessons, as they glide through the air, feel the joy of flight.

As they arc round in the sky, Dragonsgrasp comes into view again. High as they are, she can't see the stone pathways and buildings, the

bronze fountains bubbling gently, the DragonLords attending to their duties within the fortress, the dragon pens where the bonded dragons and those awaiting their partner can mill around and stretch their wings, although she knows they're down there.

Dragonsgrasp passes below them as Vilmor and Cryozen Jr fly forwards, towards the winter sun.

Elemental Foothills

Warlic's Tent

Surewould
Forest

Falconreach

Ravenloss

The Locker

Surewould Forest

Ravenloss

They say all roads lead to Falconreach, and that is true.

Falconreach is a town of foundations strong...

Breaking News: The Auction House to reopen soon!

The Travelling Treasures Auction House, which has been unfortunately closed since the arrival of the Rose, is reopening soon! Gris and Nati, of the Travelling Treasures, have announced that their preparations to reopen the Travelling Treasures Auction House will be complete in a "soon but still indefinite period of time, when we have collected some exotic pieces." We reached out to the legendary Hero of Falconreach, who had the following to comment about this exciting reopening:

"I'm excited for the grand reopening. It feels like I've already been waiting ten years! But I hope they actually... have some items to bid on this time? Y'know, actual auctions at the auction house? Last time they just hired me to hunt for treasure. Maybe other heroes would buy some of my gear. I feel like if I auctioned off my Gloom Glaive, I would be rich! If only they were open before it mysteriously became weaker, though..."

We wish the best luck to the Travelling Treasures! To any adventurers or mercenaries, please contact Gris if you are interested in retrieving items for the auction house!

—

Adopt from Aria's Pet Shop!

Ever wanted your very own sentient tree stump? How about a pitgrinder, or a pathstalker to pounce on your prey? Then visit Aria's Pet Shop! Aria has been working hard to keep Falconreach's beloved Grams' memory alive and is offering a selection of pets... as long as you go out and find them, she will stable and tame your pets for you! Selections include goldfishes, cinders, snailmails, pathstalkers, stumpies, dementons, and pit grinders - a perfect variety of cute and cuddly house pets, as well as ferocious companions for any adventurer. And a word from Aria:

"The woods and lakes surrounding Falconreach are filled with all sorts of wonderful magical creatures, but with the Rose taking up camp nearby... I want to save as many magical creatures as I can from them. Magic is a part of life and all creatures deserve to live. So please, if you find any, bring them to me! I can promise you that if I train it, you can count on it!"

Help Aria keep the memory of Grams alive and save the magic of Falconreach!

by Sienrid

— — — — —

The Guardian Tower stands tall.

New recruits and old guard pass through its doors, the town grows and prospers underneath its watch, the wings of the falcons atop its parapets spreading proudly.

The Guardian Tower stands tall.

It's burned to the ground, a dracolich fortress smashes it to pieces, the forces of doom tear it down, it even got turned into a fish that one time. But each time it is rebuilt by Guardians and townsfolk with stone and heart and defiance running through, to resume its watch over the town.

The Guardian Tower stands tall.

A Hero comes to Falconreach. A Dragon of Prophecy is born in a secret cave within its walls. Those who will move the foundations of Lore itself visit and reside within the town. The world changes. Falconreach grows.

The Guardian Tower stands tall.

by theloverofdragons

...of townsfolk and protectors...

You are a Guardian of Falconreach. A protector. A force for good, to combat the forces of evil. Of darkness. Through crisis after crisis, you stand strong, stand tall, and do everything you can.

But the crises pile up, and up, and up. The battles pile up. The *losses* pile up. And with those losses, strain. Cracks. Doubts.

Falconreach rises, over and over, and so do you. But eventually— it is all too much.

You change your name, you change your hair, you change your allegiance.

You abandon your home. You abandon your comrades.

(But does your home abandon you?)

—

It's not like you want to move out of the Doomwood. But with that brat in charge of the Necropolis— well. It doesn't matter. Between the Rose and... everything else, there aren't a lot of options.

You move into the Guardian Tower in Falconreach. The attic, specifically.

And it's... not bad, for a while. The Guardians don't bother you if you make enough spooky noises. No one bothers you.

And then they do. The Hero, un-iced, the Guardians-

It's awful.

And yet... when Falconreach is threatened, you rise to defend it. Why wouldn't you? You live there, too, after all.

—

They tell you that it is impossible, that it cannot be done. That for people like you, like your sisters, living anywhere 'normal', let alone somewhere with a *Guardian Tower*, is naught but madness.

You prove them all wrong.

It's not smooth, of course. People are wary of yagas, and rightfully so. But once the town adjusts to your presence, once they get to know you...

They see you as you are. And you are *welcome*, valued, and your humble shop sees fine business, and...

Falconreach becomes a home in truth. And it is your home, with all that entails.

—

Sometimes, you can't help but think about it. The 'what could have beens,' if things had happened differently.

Falconreach could have been a home to you, once, before the flames and the madness and everything after. You could have been more than simply a temporary resident, an apprentice there to learn from a master so you could take skills you learned home with you,

the home you'd *had* then.

The home you lost, completely and utterly, when Akriloth came. And then you lost yourself, to grief, to madness, to flame.

And the chance of Falconreach becoming your home was lost, too.

—

You didn't really mean for it to happen. You are not really sure when it *did* happen. But one day, the realization hits you. That rather being an outsider looking in, off in the woods outside of town, you are now a *part* of the community that you used to terrorize every year.

You assist now, instead of purposefully causing problems. You are assisted, in turn, when there is need for it. Cared for. Included. *Defended*.

There are mishaps, there always are, but... you have found belonging. Your belief in science is not spurned, but accepted. And it is... *good*.

by tve-creates

— — — — —

He pinches the bridge of his nose, sighing as he looks at his chalkboard. It's bad enough that Cysero keeps getting into his workshop, without tripping a single sensor or mildly inconvenient trap, and writing on his chalkboard. That he has the gall to try and fix his work? And be correct?! Insufferable!!! Why does he even know about theoretical physics!?! He allows himself a frustrated yell before taking a deep breath and adjusting his goggles. This clearly just means that Cysero is finally understanding the superiority of SCIENCE!

And Lim isn't going to let this work go to waste.

—

For a long time, he wanted to be a knight. The prestigious title, the royal recognition, the honor.

He became one, of a sort, and he realized it wasn't knighthood he was wanting.

Titles come with responsibilities that would take him from his family.

Royal recognition means nothing when the king turns his back on his people.

He doesn't need a proper knighthood to conduct himself with honor.

He has his princess, her presence diminished but still by his side.

He has the trust of those around him.

He has the skills to defend his home.

That's enough for him.

—

Sheppie was going to leave Falconreach.

He had the savings to buy a farm. Had arranged for his son to study in Swordhaven. He'd be close enough to visit his Ma. He could visit his son after the harvest.

Then The Rose was founded.

He asked for time to think about the farm.

The Rose grew.

He broke off the arrangement for his son's study.

Its influence spread.

His savings remained tucked away.

He could still leave.

But he watches his Ma demonstrate a fire-starting spell, sparks flying around his son's fingers as he mimics her.

Plans can always change.

—

As The Rose comes to power, a large number of magic users flock to Falconreach for safety.

Many are happy to teach a moglin a few tricks, especially with an offer of spellberries in return.

She learns a bit of everything.

She doesn't need a match to start a fire. She can always find fresh water. Items on high shelves are no longer out of her reach. She will never be blinded by darkness.

She even learns a bit of necromancy, difficult as it may be.

She does enjoy talking to the spirits.

There are so many around, after all.

—

Very few moglins leave their home towns; the ones that do don't tend to go far. Before coming to Falconreach, Spruce hadn't heard of any moglin going further than they had. They stayed in town to listen to Twilly talk about his journeys with Lady Celestia. They never decided to leave.

They started working at the inn slowly. Running errands, keeping an eye on the oven, helping clean after a particularly busy night. Spruce stopped needing to ask what had to be done, falling into the inn's rhythm easily. Serenity was glad for the help, teaching them all that she could.

The loss of Serenity hit Spruce harder than they let on. They did their best to keep the inn running smoothly, but they were one moglin. They were thankful for any help offered, even if the relief was fleeting. At night they dreamt of blades biting into bread and bone.

Their relief is palpable when a stranger offers to work for room and board. He learns quickly and Spruce takes the opportunity to sort through Serenity's desk, untouched since the Calamity. Later, Gaelan finds them staring at a letter saying that if anything happens to her, the inn is theirs.

by arcane-antler

...of hope and home...

A weary traveler emerged from the forests of Oaklore, their path illuminated by tiny pinpricks of starlight. A young dragon dozed in their backpack, cozy and safe. If they encountered the Rose or

bandits, the traveler would handle it. After so many years of adventuring, a little trouble on the road was nothing they needed to wake their partner over. But their path remained clear, their travels quiet. So the traveler was left alone with their thoughts.

Greenguard was not an easy land to live in. The quiet night hid scars of battle. Undead invasions, calamities, wars, and apocalypses beyond counting. Just a short time ago, the world itself had cracked apart, new Fissures forming across these lands and beyond. Scarred as this land and its people were, it was beautiful, too. After every battle, the boars and gorillaphants returned to the forests, the sneevils reclaimed their forts, the knights and bandits resumed their perpetual cat-and-mouse game.

The traveler reached the cliffs circling Falconreach Bay. The ever-present Ser Pent had bunked down for the night, his presence marked only by a small, cozy sleeping tent emblazoned with a pactogon. A short time ago, the traveler would have been delighted to see the Keep's soldiers flying under their own banner again, rather than the dreadful silver flower of the Rose. As nice as it was to see their grip on Lore's people finally diminishing under Queen Victoria's rule, the observation just left the traveler feeling hollow.

They continued over the bay, across the Hydra's bridge. The monster's corpse was still there, patching the gap in the middle, and their trudging footsteps squelched uncomfortably as they crossed its skull. It remained sturdy as ever, though. Perhaps that was why no one had bothered to repair the bridge properly. As long as it didn't rise from the dead again, they supposed that was fine. If it ever did, the Hero would be there to save the day. They always were, weren't they?

Almost always.

As the traveler neared the city gates, they veered left, avoiding the gazes of the Guardians on watch. They were eager to rest, but there was a place they did not visit nearly enough. They followed the warm glow of eternally-burning candles to a sprawling cemetery, built in the wake of the Black Winter. The scale of that particular tragedy would've made a mass grave the far more practical solution. But the Necromancers of Falconreach proved themselves thorough and thoughtful, with the same unwavering compassion as the others who found refuge here. Every grave was marked, every lost soul accounted for.

The traveler sat for a time, beneath the grave of a stranger, careful not to wake their draconic companion. Many years of adventuring, helping where they could, taught them that they couldn't save everyone. No one could, not even heroes. The people buried here were those whom the Hero of Falconreach couldn't save. Many of them died fighting. Thanks to them, the city had hope, a chance to rebuild from the ruin. And so it did. It always did, didn't it?

The traveler stood, leaning heavily on their spear. They were more exhausted than they had been in a long time, but felt oddly warmed by the glow of eternal candlelight. They returned to the city gates, this time giving the Guardians on watch a friendly nod. They seemed to sense the traveler's fatigue, and let them pass without inquiry. It wasn't as if they were a stranger.

They entered the city, and the distant light of stars and candles was replaced by the soft glow of windows. Falconreach's people settled down for a cherished, peaceful night. The traveler made their way to the main square, where Twilly slept on his favorite log. The city's iconic Guardian Tower watched over them all, above the cursed bones of the fortress which once destroyed it. Their protectors fell, but its people didn't give up hope. They never did, did they?

The traveler finally retired to the Serene Inn, where they were greeted by a chipper moglin. Spruce handed them a fresh loaf of bread: a familiar, timeless recipe that would always taste like home. They found a seat by the inn's hearth and pulled their pack into their lap, hugging their beloved dragon close to their chest. The little one stirred in mild annoyance, but didn't wake.

They accepted long ago that their fight would never end. Weary as they were, they owed it to these people, this city of hope and resilience, to persist with the same fire. It was their purpose, this Hero of Falconreach, to keep that hope alive. The Hero of Falconreach would never disappear again. They were always the one to live, never the one to make the noble sacrifice. Always the one left to mourn, then get up and fight another day.

They overcame Sepulchure, the Darkness Dracolich, Wargoth, Jaania and her Rose. Now, there was a new fight on the horizon. On nights like tonight, when the weight of the world grew too heavy, they found a place to rest their head in Falconreach. They always would.

by 7yd1a

...and above all, Falconreach is a town...

...of Heroes

Credits

Ali

Dragesvard
high-voltage-rat

Arthur

Willowshire
gauzestarr

Cabbage

Surewould Forest
failedcabbage

Entropienn

Duat
entropienn

Jen

Amityvale
tve-creates

Kaz

Sepulchure's Fortress
forgottenvalorart

KeaneArts

Warlic's Tent
keanearts

LittleDemy

Ravenloss
little-demy

Moon

Nieboheim
wisp-of-the-willow

Sienrid

Edelia
sienrid

Snorri

Toglandia
trashtiel

Static

Ruins of Kordana
arcane-antler

Credits

Rue

The Shears
rudyyrue

Tmae

Sunbreeze Grove
tmae3114

7yd1a

Swordhaven
7yd1a

Cyraen

cyraen-ae

Watson

The Necropolis

Falconreach Collab.
BlueSky.
Tumblr.
Archive of Our Own.
Neocities.

Zine Organizers.
April Fools.
Zine Cover Artist.
Project Lead.
Zine Moderator.
Graphic Designer.

Dot

Sulen'eska
dotventures

El

Dragonsgrasp
theloverofdragons

MixMatch

Popsprocket
mixmatch777

Rose

Oaklore Keep, Atrea
lessthanthre3

Thanks to Gareth Edwards for Gold Text

Falconreach Credits

Heroes | From top left:

Mira, drawn and owned by **Dot**;
Lydia, owned by **7yd1a** and drawn by **LittleDemy**;
Thallen, owned by **Cyraen** and drawn by **Rue**;
Luna and *Shadow*, owned by **El** and drawn by **Arthur**;
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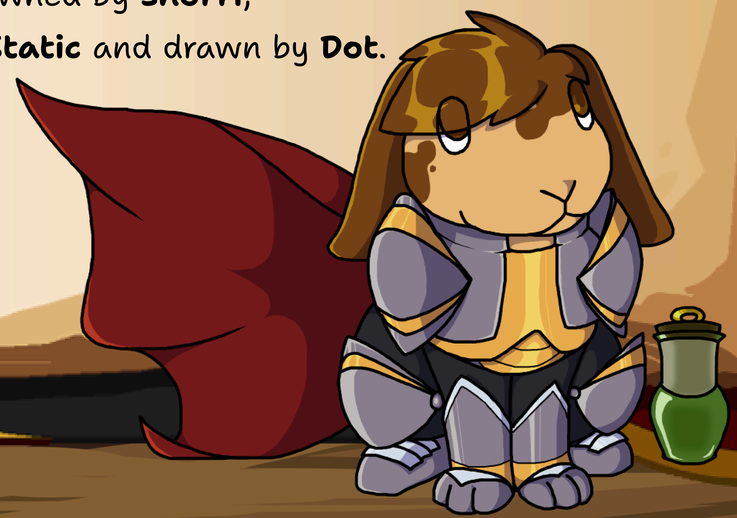

Additional Credits

Postcards:

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El: Nieboheim, Edelia, The Shears, Sunbreeze Grove, Sulen'eska, Toglandia, Amityvale, Seppy's Fortress, Dragonsgrasp, Dragesvard, Falconreach, The Locker
7yd1a: Swordhaven, Braughlmurk, Toglandia, Atrea, Warlic's Tent, Lymcrest, Xan's Fortress (Background), Dragonsgrasp, Dragesvard, Ravenloss
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KeaneArts, for lost Ptoleme poster
7yd1a, for graphic design leadership, save the blorbos advert
MixMatch, for illustrations, Artix bunny
Rose, for back cover page composition, illustrations
Snorri, for Tek missing poster